

Characters

- TRESSA
- PAULA
- JACK
- WILMA
- ERIC

*An empty warehouse or barn. The downstage area has been turned into a living space. In the center there is a pit, as large as the space permits. On the down side of the pit there is a railing and stairs that lead to the floor below. On both sides of the pit there are planks that lead to the upstage area. On the down-left area there is the entrance to a bathroom, a kitchen, and TRESSA's bedroom.*

*Center stage, down of the railing, there is a bench that will serve as a bed. On the right there is a table and four chairs. On the upstage side of the pit there is another bench that also serves as a bed. On the upstage right of the bench there is a folding screen and to the left there is an armchair. Upstage of the screen there is a kitchen.*

*Downstage left there is a small table (table 2) with a chair facing upstage. To the right of the table there is a carpenter's cabinet. At the start one of its drawers is open. On top of the cabinet there is a cassette player and a table mirror.*

Act 1

ACT I

*( The stage lights are very dim. A car is heard stopping outside. There is the sound of a car door opening and closing. The lights of dawn are seen on the wall stage right as the doors below open. Steps are heard. A light is turned on downstairs. TRESSA is seen coming up the steps. She wears a light coat over a dress and white oxford shoes. She carries a purse over her shoulder and a nurse's uniform over her arm. She walks to a light switch and turns on a dim overhead light She walks to the table, takes a notebook and pencil from her purse and lays them on the table. She walks to the upstage area, taking the purse and uniform with her. On the way there, she leans over PAULA, who is asleep on the upper bench, and gently pulls the covers over her shoulders. She then walks to the cassette player and turns it on. Billie Holliday's "Don't Explain" is heard. She walks behind the screen, hangs the purse and uniform on it. She takes off her coat, shoes, stockings, and dress, puts on an undershirt, puts on the pants of a blue cotton Chinese worker's outfit, puts on plain Chinese black slippers and a Chinese worker's jacket. She walks down and left to the kitchen, then reenters with a cup of coffee, and she walks to the table. She turns on the overhead lamp, sits, and goes over her notes, pencil in hand. In the course of her reading she makes some pencil corrections.)*

TRESSA HARRIS

6 p`m` Patient in bed. Intermittent cough. Fogger in use. Skin very dry. Lotion applied to extremities.

8:30 Patient raising green phlegm periodically. Fluids not accepted.

11 p`m` Dr` Winternits in to visit. Heparin lock d/c. 3 a`m` Patient incontinent of large amount of formed soft yellow BM. Decibitus care given. Mycitracin ointment to skin on buttocks.

3:30 Massage applied to legs. Elastic stockings replaced. /c legs elevated.

6 a`m` Patient resting in bed at this time. Relieved by Nurse Becker.

Tressa Harris RN.

*( She turns to look in the direction of PAULA ; she turns back and leans her head on her hands for a moment. She takes a drink of coffee and walks left, taking the cup of coffee with her. She stops at the light switch and turns on the light on the left of the upper platform. She sits on the chair on the upper platform.)*

PAULA

( *half asleep* )

Who's there?

TRESSA HARRIS

It's me.

PAULA

Oh.

TRESSA HARRIS

What's the matter?

PAULA

You scared me.

(TRESSA *goes to* PAULA.)

TRESSA HARRIS

( *touching* PAULA'S *face.* )

It's just me.

PAULA

I was dreaming.

TRESSA HARRIS

What were you dreaming?

(TRESSA *starts walking down.* )

PAULA

Someone came in. He came in said he was looking for a tool.

TRESSA HARRIS

What did he look like?

PAULA

He was short. He had long shiny straight hair like a Latin. He wore baggy pants that went up to his chest like a zoot suit. He wore suspenders. And a white shirt. And he was very clean. That's why I wasn't scared--as if murderers couldn't be clean. He had a big moustache and a big nose. He said his name was Jose Luis. Do you know any Jose Luis?

TRESSA HARRIS

That must have been Jack.

PAULA

You think I wouldn't recognize Jack?

TRESSA HARRIS

What happened then?

PAULA

He sat there where you're sitting.

TRESSA HARRIS

And then?

PAULA

He said he couldn't possibly marry me.

TRESSA HARRIS

What made him say that?

PAULA

I don't know. I never asked him to.--Then he said, "Look at me. Hairs growing out of my nostrils. A moustache. Look at my moustache. Look at my gold tooth. I'm a short guy. Why should I marry you?" Then he leaned forward and said, "Do your legs want to wrap themselves around me?" I said, "Sure."

TRESSA HARRIS

What?

PAULA

I lost my sense of judgment. It didn't matter to me who I wrapped my legs around.

TRESSA HARRIS

Paula!

PAULA

I'm kidding. I wasn't awake.--He said, "OK."

(PAULA *shrugs her shoulders*. TRESSA *laughs*.)

TRESSA HARRIS

What happened then?

PAULA

I don't know.

(PAULA *shrugs again*.)

TRESSA HARRIS

You want coffee?

(TRESSA *starts to go to the left ramp*.)

PAULA

( *walking down the right ramp*)

I'll get it.

TRESSA HARRIS

I'll get it.

( *as she exits left*)

Anything else happen while I was gone?

PAULA

Pete called.

TRESSA HARRIS

He misses you?

PAULA

I guess. He wanted to see if I got in OK. And to say he was OK.

TRESSA HARRIS

That's nice. How is he?

PAULA

He's fine.

TRESSA HARRIS

Good. Did Jack call?

PAULA

No.

TRESSA HARRIS

He's coming.

PAULA

He is? When?

TRESSA HARRIS

Early. He said early. He can't wait to see you. He's bringing croissants.

(TRESSA *exits left.*)

PAULA

Are you staying up?

TRESSA HARRIS

Yes. I'm wide awake.

PAULA

How's your patient?

TRESSA HARRIS

Not good. He was in pain.

PAULA

Did you get any rest?

TRESSA HARRIS

*( entering with a cup of coffee for PAULA )*

No.

*( pause )*

I think he's going to die.

PAULA

Will he go to the hospital?

TRESSA HARRIS

He wants to stay home.

*( She gives PAULA the coffee and returns to the up-left chair. )*

PAULA

Why?

TRESSA HARRIS

I think he's given up.

PAULA

You can't save him?

TRESSA HARRIS

Me? Save him?

PAULA

*( standing and opening her arms )*

I always think when I'm about to die I'll call your name and you'll run to my side and save me. You'll just put your hand on my forehead and I'll get well.

TRESSA HARRIS

Sure, that's what we nurses do.

PAULA

That's right.

(PAULA walks to TRESSA, puts her arm around her, and leans her head on hers.)

PAULA

At least you.

(PAULA goes to the bench and puts her blanket around her shoulders.)

TRESSA HARRIS

I just work hard making people comfortable.

(PAULA walks down toward the table and sits.)

TRESSA HARRIS

...if possible. So they can bear their pain... their agony. If they get well my work is rewarded. It's wonderful to see their first smile as they begin to feel better. And even more wonderful if that smile is directed at me.

(TRESSA walks down.)

When they begin to feel better they feel you've been a partner in their cure because you've watched them at every step. They are grateful and appreciative for the help you've given them.

PAULA

And if they don't survive?

( She walks to the table.)

TRESSA HARRIS

If they don't survive we feel a sense of loss.

( She sits.)

We've lost the battle.

PAULA

Have you lost the battle for Russell?

TRESSA HARRIS

Yes, I think he wants to die.

(TRESSA walks to the downstage bench and sits. She is despondent. PAULA walks to her and kisses her forehead.)

PAULA

You should rest, dear.

TRESSA HARRIS

I will.

(TRESSA exits left and speaks from offstage.)

You want anything?

PAULA

Like what?

TRESSA HARRIS

Breakfast?

PAULA

No thank you. I'm not ready to get up yet. I'm going back to bed.

( *She starts to get into bed, reaches for her cup, and hands it to TRESSA.*)

I'll have some more coffee though.

(TRESSA *goes into the kitchen.*)

TRESSA HARRIS

( *offstage*)

So, how are things with you?

PAULA

All right I suppose...

(PAULA *sits on the lower bench.*)

The same.

TRESSA HARRIS

( *entering with a headband on and holding an open jar of yellowish white base, which she is applying to her face*)

What do you mean?

PAULA

( *lying on the bench*)

I'm not well. But I don't pay any attention to it.

TRESSA HARRIS

( *going to the table left*)

What's wrong?

PAULA

I pretend I'm well. No one has told me that I'm well. But I act as if I am.

(TRESSA *starts walking to PAULA.*)

PAULA

As if I've been told by a doctor that I'm well, and I can go ahead and do whatever I want. Well, I haven't been told that. If I stop taking my heart pills, I'll die.

TRESSA HARRIS

( *going to the left side of the bench and kneeling*)

...Paula...

PAULA

Yes.--I keep doing the work on the farm and I keep saying, "It's not going to harm me." I keep saying that. But there's a voice inside me that tells me, "If you keep doing what you're doing you're going to die." The next shovel you push through the dirt will kill you."

( *as if replying to herself*)

"This is good for me." If I carry a sack of feed: "This has to be good for me." I can't just stand there and let everything I've worked for go to waste, sit and let the animals lie on their own manure, uncared for, let them starve and die. Let them get sick and die. I can't do that. I can't just let my meadows go to waste. I can't sit there and watch the weeds take over and do nothing. That's not the way I am. I'd rather die. I don't want to be different from the way I am. I don't want to be a different person just to stay alive. If the person I am dies, then I die.--If taking care of what I love kills me, then I want to die.--"It's a Russian roulette," the voice says. "Every time you climb a ladder or pick up a bag of feed or a bucket of manure it can be the last."

( *pause*)

I can die.

( *snapping her fingers*)

Just like that.--Next time you run after a sheep.

( *snaps her fingers*)

Like that!

( *standing*)

I can't afford to pay someone to take care of things.

( *showing TRESSA the palm of her hands*)

Look at my hands.

(TRESSA *takes her hands affectionately.*)

PAULA

Pete wants to help. He has gotten in debt for me. But he can't borrow any more. He's lost his credit. He's done all he can to help...can't ask him to do any more. He humiliates himself for me. They won't lend him any more money. I can't bear it. You'd think I'd make enough money selling the milk and the wool and the eggs. But I don't I don't know how to make it work. It costs more to feed the animals than what you could earn from them. I owe that money to Peter I want to pay him back. He says not to be silly, that he's my husband and besides he is my partner. But that's not so. He's gone into it just to help me. He's never understood why I do it--keep my hands in the dirt all day long. I don't want to ask him for money and I still do it. I ask him for more money. It's a loan. I always say it's a loan. I've never looked kindly on people who can't take care of themselves and their obsessions or their vices; people who make excuses for themselves and make others pay their bill. That's what I'm doing. I know I should sell the animals and most of the land. But I can't. I'm like a drug addict who will do anything to satisfy her vice. I've lost my faith, my honor, my sense of pride. I still have them though...

( *as if seeing them*)

I still have them...running in my meadow.

(PAULA *looks at her hands.*)

I do the work because I have to. Because I can't afford to get help. If I don't I would have to watch them starve to death. Do you think I could sit there and watch them die in a swamp of manure? I couldn't. I would die before them. I couldn't stand



seeing them suffer.

TRESSA HARRIS

( *saddened* )

...Oh, Paula.

PAULA

...Oh, Paula...

( *standing and crossing to the right of the bench and sitting* )

Oh, Paula.--Don't worry. Don't worry. It doesn't matter. My life is over.-There's nothing to worry about.

TRESSA HARRIS

Are you crazy? Your life is over?

PAULA

It is. Whether I die or not. I'm serious. From here on it's downhill. A downhill ride.

( *She somersaults off the bench down center and remains seated.* )

I know my life is over. So my problems are over

( *She sits on the floor.* )

TRESSA HARRIS

Oh, Paula...

PAULA

They are. I have suffered disappointment after disappointment, humiliation after humiliation. And I've survived it. So I've nothing to worry about.

TRESSA HARRIS

Oh, Paula...

PAULA

( *interrupting* )

Don't say anything. Forget everything I said. I don't want to depress you.--What are you doing tonight?

TRESSA HARRIS

I work tonight. What are you doing this afternoon?

PAULA

I'm going out.

TRESSA HARRIS

( *walking to PAULA* )

Doing what?

PAULA

I have a couple of things to do in town. Which I won't do till this afternoon, because I'm going back to bed.

( *kissing* TRESSA)

Good night.

( *walking up to the bench*)

I'm free for dinner. You want to have dinner? Then I'm going to a party which you're welcome to come to. Tomorrow I go home bright and early.

( *As they speak PAULA fixes the covers on the bench. TRESSA goes to table 2 and continues applying the cream.*)

TRESSA HARRIS

When do you think you'll be back?

PAULA

About four, I guess. At what time are you going to work?

TRESSA HARRIS

Six. Six to midnight.

PAULA

I guess you can't go to the party unless you want to go after work.

TRESSA HARRIS

I can't see people after work. I have to unwind. If I'm up when you get back we can have a drink. If we don't see each other tonight, wake me up tomorrow before you leave. Say good-bye.

PAULA

I will.

( *turns to* TRESSA)

What is that you're putting on your face?

TRESSA HARRIS

Cream.

(PAULA *walks to* TRESSA *and looks at her face.*)

PAULA

Hm?--What does it do?

TRESSA HARRIS

I like...the way it feels on my skin.

PAULA

It's white?

TRESSA HARRIS

Yes.

PAULA

It looks nice.

TRESSA HARRIS

It goes with my pajamas.

PAULA

Yes, it does.

TRESSA HARRIS

It makes me feel calm to wear this. It soothes me. When I wear this I feel smooth, calm...People dress in a certain way to feel in a certain way. It's natural for me to dress this way. I feel whole. It soothes me.

PAULA

And if you're not dressed like this?

TRESSA HARRIS

I feel...clumsy.

PAULA

Clumsy?--You're not clumsy.

TRESSA HARRIS

Maybe I'm not. But I feel clumsy.

PAULA

I think you're very lovely.

TRESSA HARRIS

I thank you.--I think I'm a cross dresser.

PAULA

How's that?

TRESSA HARRIS

Yes.

PAULA

Could you explain that to me?

TRESSA HARRIS

I don't think I can...When I dress like this I feel I'm a man.--I feel I am an Asian man. Thoroughly an Asian man. My heart, my groin, my head, my tongue, my hands, I like to dress like this. I like the way it feels on my body. I like looking at my face in the mirror when I have my yellow face, my oblique eyes. I like the way my voice sounds, the way these clothes make

me think. I like my Oriental face. My feet. I feel calm like this. Calm. I'd dress as a Western man to go to a party. To fool around. But when I dress like this. I'm not fooling around.

PAULA

Seeing you like this makes me feel I'm with a man...a lovely man...How exotic...

*( The phone rings. PAULA offers her hand to TRESSA. They do a very quick minuet kind of walk to the timing of the telephone rings. PAULA picks up the receiver and hands it to TRESSA.)*

TRESSA HARRIS

Hello...

*( She listens and smiles. She looks at PAULA and mouths the word "Jack." PAULA nods. They both smile with glee.)*

Yeah...

*( pause)*

Yeah...

*( pause; then, she laughs)*

Oh...

*( pause; then, in surprise and amusement)*

Oh...

*( pause; then, in surprise and amusement)*

Oh, my God.--Yeah. Yeah. OK. Right. Yeah-yeah, I know. Fine-fine. OK.

*( laughs)*

OK.

*( She hangs up the receiver. She laughs again.)*

That was Jack.

*( She starts down the stairs.)*

He's round the corner.

PAULA

Oh, boy.

TRESSA HARRIS

Yes. He's funny.

PAULA

He's a funny guy.

*(PAULA takes a dress and a pair of shoes from behind the screen, examining the dress, starts coming down the left plank and into the bathroom. She reenters and walks up the left plank and behind the screen. She reappears with more clothes and goes into the bathroom. Then, she enters and goes up the left plank. TRESSA comes up the steps. She is pensive. She stops center. PAULA turns to her.)*

PAULA

What's the matter?

TRESSA HARRIS

Jack is in bad shape. He believes he's ill but he's not.

PAULA

What do you mean?

TRESSA HARRIS

He thinks he has AIDS. His friend is very sick. He has AIDS. But Jack doesn't. He's obsessed with it. He tests negative. But he doesn't trust the test. He's sure he's HIV positive and has been for years. The slightest bruise or sore makes him think that it's the start of AIDS. He keeps getting tested. And it keeps coming out negative.

( *She walks down right.* )

I think he'd be relieved if he tested positive. He's like a paranoid who feels relieved if someone is actually following him. He'd say, "See I was right. I'm being followed." I can't help him. I can't convince him he doesn't have AIDS. He just thinks the tests are not accurate. On the surface he seems all right but he's tormented. Obsessed. Sometimes he frightens me. He hallucinates. It will kill him. In the end it will kill him.

( *The downstairs door is heard opening.* )

JACK

( *offstage* )

Hello.

( *pause* )

Anybody home?

(*PAULA takes her clothes to the bathroom. TRESSA goes to the railing.*)

TRESSA HARRIS

Here.

(*PAULA reenters.*)

JACK

Cover your eyes.

( *They cover their eyes. JACK comes upstairs. He wears a false moustache, glasses, a nose, and a gold tooth. He wears a leather jacket and blue jeans.* )

JACK

Taaaaa...!!!

( *They uncover their eyes.* )

JACK

Hi girls!

PAULA and TRESSA

Jack...!!!

(PAULA jumps on JACK and puts her legs around him. She takes the glasses, nose, and moustache off him.)

PAULA

How wonderful to see you.

( touches his face, kisses it, kisses his hand)

How wonderful to be with you.

( touches his face again)

Let me see you.

( He gives her a big smile showing the gold tooth.

PAULA

Jack!

JACK

What?

PAULA

( pointing to the tooth)

The tooth.

JACK

It's not real.

( He looks at Tressa and points to the gold tooth.)

Chocolate wrap. How good to see you.

PAULA

It was you!

JACK

What?

PAULA

Jose Luis.

JACK

Me--Jose Luis. You--Conchita.

( He laughs.)

You're crazy.

( *They laugh. He takes off his nose and moustache.*)

PAULA

( *taking him by the arm to the left*)

Come with me.

JACK

Where are you taking me?

PAULA

You'll see.

JACK

She has something up her sleeve.

PAULA

I have something up my sleeve.

JACK

What is it?

( *They exit left.*)

PAULA

Close your eyes.

JACK

They are closed.

(pause)

TRESSA HARRIS

Watch it! One more step.

( *pause*)

Turn around.

JACK

Can I open my eyes?

TRESSA HARRIS

Not yet.

( *pause*)

JACK

It's a coat!!

TRESSA HARRIS

Don't look yet!!

JACK

It's a coat! It's a coat! It's a coat!

(JACK *enters wearing a man's nineteenth-century frock, jumping.*)

Paula look! It's a coat! It's a coat! Oh! Oh!

( *He gets his briefcase from the landing.*)

I brought my new play.

( *He sits on the bench and opens the briefcase.*)

Let's read it.

( *Improvising music that vibrates as the birth of a miracle, he slowly brings his hands inside the briefcase and takes out two copies of a play. Holding a copy of the play in each hand, he extends one to TRESSA and one to PAULA.*)

PAULA

( *gently*)

I'm not up yet.

JACK

( *disappointed*)

Oh.

PAULA

I haven't washed my face.

JACK

( *pouting*)

...You don't have to wash your face...

PAULA

...I was on my way to wash up...

JACK

( *hugging the scripts to his chest and pouting*)

...I thought you'd want to read it...

PAULA

I have to brush my teeth...

(JACK *sighs.*)

PAULA



I won't take long.

JACK

...Please, don't take long.

PAULA

( *sweetly* )

I won't. I don't have that many teeth.

JACK

( *pouting* )

OK, but don't take long.

PAULA

I won't.

(PAULA *exits left* JACK *throws himself on the floor and has a pouting tantrum. He bangs on the floor with fists and feet.*)

JACK

She doesn't want to read it...She doesn't want to read it.

( *toward the bathroom* )

You don't want to read it.

( *to the heavens* )

No one wants to read my play! No one wants to read my play! No one wants to read my play!

( *He lies on his stomach and bangs his fists on the floor. As he walks to the bathroom.* )

How long are you going to take?

( *He goes into the bathroom.* )

Please, don't take long.

PAULA

( *amused* )

Jack...!

JACK

Five minutes? Three minutes?

( *silence* )

Half an hour?

PAULA

Jack...

JACK

Ten...minutes?

PAULA

Go away, Jack.

( *He enters and goes to TRESSA.* )

JACK

Would you read it.

(*TRESSA takes the script and starts to read. JACK sits on the floor to watch her read.*)

JACK

Paula, Tressa's reading it.

( *He looks at Tressa for signs. He walks away, turns to look at her from a different angle, circles her, lies down with his head propped on his hand. She smiles.* )

JACK

Paula, she's smiling.

( *She is still reading. He watches her. She laughs. He contracts with a tremor of pleasure. He watches awhile longer. She smiles again, then laughs.* )

JACK

Paula, she's laughing!

PAULA

Good.

( *A moment passes. TRESSA turns the page. She reads.* )

JACK

Paula, she's still reading. It must be good.

PAULA

Is it good, Tressa?

TRESSA HARRIS

Huh Huh.

PAULA

Can you tell yet?

TRESSA HARRIS

It's good.

PAULA

What is it about?

TRESSA HARRIS

Compote.

PAULA

Compost?

TRESSA HARRIS

Compote, Paula!

PAULA

Is it good?

TRESSA HARRIS

Yeah.

( *to Jack*)

When did you write this?

JACK

( *professional*)

It's just a first draft. It's not there yet. I just started it,

( *stands and paces, doing important-person gestures*)

The premise. A man and a woman. He, from the city. She, from a farm. Vermont. The conflict between urban and rural life. Two different cultures. That is the premise.

( *pause*)

It has saved my life. It has made me calm down, be still, I don't spend nights roaming around the city anymore.

TRESSA HARRIS

You weren't here last night?

JACK

No. Why?

TRESSA HARRIS

The gold tooth.

JACK

( *taking out the gold foil*)

Just foil.

TRESSA HARRIS

Paula dreamt you came in with a gold tooth.

JACK

She did? Hmm. Smart.

( *pointing to his own head* )

She's smart.

( *pointing to where PAULA is* )

Smart girl.

( *speaking out to PAULA* )

Paula.

PAULA

What?

JACK

You dreamt about my tooth.

PAULA

That's right.

( *PAULA enters. She wears a smart business suit, high heels, and makeup.* )

JACK

God, Paula, you look great!

( *She poses.* )

JACK

Where are you going?

PAULA

I'm doing a few errands.

JACK

You have a date?

PAULA

...No, I don't have a date.

JACK

Tell Jack.

PAULA

( *dropping the pose* )

I'm seeing a man about a job.

JACK

A man?

PAULA

A job.

JACK

A job? In town?

PAULA

No, not in town.

JACK

Oh, I thought you'd stay in town.

PAULA

Not in town. Freelance. From home.

JACK

What's the job?

PAULA

Research.

JACK

On what?

PAULA

Husbandry.

JACK

That's right up your alley.

PAULA

Yeap.

JACK

For whom?

PAULA

A conservancy magazine.

JACK

Ah! I hope you get it.

PAULA

Have my fingers crossed.

JACK

Cross mine too.

PAULA

I'll also be meeting a man about a loan.

JACK

Hmm. What man?

PAULA

A man in a bank. I owe money.

JACK

Hmm.

JACK

The farm?

( *She nods.* )

Hope you get it.

PAULA

Yeah.

JACK

You should get all the money you need.

PAULA

I sure should.

JACK

How could they refuse you?

PAULA

They couldn't.

JACK

Of course they couldn't.

PAULA

I'm also going to see Dr. Eckland.

JACK

...Eckland...

PAULA

Cardiologist.

JACK

Oh?

PAULA

Uh huh.

JACK

You?

PAULA

Yeap.

JACK

Since when?

PAULA

A while. He's going to do some tests.

JACK

That's a bunch of things you're doing.

PAULA

That's right. You see why I have to look sharp.

JACK

That's right.

PAULA

( *laughs* )

Have to impress those machines.

JACK

It's an important day.

PAULA

Yeap. Loaded.

JACK

I hope you score.

PAULA

Uh huh.--Pray for me.

( *to* TRESSA)

Pray for me.

TRESSA HARRIS

With all my heart.

PAULA

Jack.--What made you put on that gold tooth and nose and moustache?

JACK

I don't know...Nothing.

PAULA

When you came in like that, I was confused.

JACK

Why?

PAULA

Last night I dreamt of a man who came in here looking just like that.

JACK

You did?

PAULA

Yes. Did you know that?

JACK

No. I just thought it was funny.

PAULA

Why is that funny?

(JACK *shrugs.*)

JACK

I got it at a funny trick store.

PAULA

( *starting to go toward the bathroom*)

Take it back. Tell them nobody found it funny. Get a refund.

(JACK *laughs*)

JACK

How's Pete?



PAULA

Pete's fine.

JACK

How're the kids?

PAULA

Kids? They're taller than Pete.

JACK

How's that possible?

PAULA

*(from the bathroom)*

It's been three years. You haven't been up in three years, Jack.

JACK

Three years?

PAULA

*( offstage)*

Yep.

JACK

You couldn't be right.

PAULA

*( offstage)*

That's what it is. Three years. Last time you came up was three years ago, it was spring.

JACK

Is that right?

PAULA

*( offstage)*

Yeah. That's the last time you came up. Three years ago.

JACK

Three years...

PAULA

*( offstage)*

That's right.

JACK

( *going to* TRESSA)

Does that sound right to you?

TRESSA HARRIS

That sounds right. That's when I got the red quilt.

JACK

The red quilt... Three since ears since the red quilt. Can't believe it. How time passes.

( *sits and leans his head*)

I can't believe it. Oh my god. Oh, my God.

( *He looks up. His eyes are full of tears. He walks right and kneels next to* TRESSA.)

Oh my God. Oh my God... How life slips through your fingers.

(TRESSA *extends her arms to* JACK. *He walks down to her and kneels.*)

TRESSA HARRIS

( *strokes his head*)

It does. It does.

( *pause*)

What's wrong, my sweet?

JACK

...I'm fine...I'm fine. How time passes...How time passes...

(TRESSA *strokes his head*)

TRESSA HARRIS

Are you working?

JACK

... Here and there...

TRESSA HARRIS

What are you doing?

JACK

ASM.

TRESSA HARRIS

ASM?

JACK

Associate Sado-Masochist.

( *short pause* )

Assistant Stage Manager. Backstage work.

PAULA

( *from the bathroom* )

Oops. What happened? The light went out. It must be the bulb.

JACK

I'll get it.

(JACK *goes to the bathroom.*)

PAULA

( *offstage* )

It's dark here.

JACK

( *offstage* )

I'll be right back.

(JACK *enters, gets a bulb from the cabinet and returns to the bathroom.*)

JACK

( *offstage* )

Where are you?

PAULA

Here.

JACK

Hold this. Do you have a match?

PAULA

No, Jack. I don't have a match.

JACK

Ouch! It's hot.

PAULA

Wait till it cools.

JACK

You mean stand here and wait till it cools?

PAULA

Well, why not?

( *They laugh.* )

JACK

You're silly.

PAULA

Here's something.

JACK

What?

PAULA

A washcloth.

JACK

It's wet!

PAULA

Yeah. Let me get something else.

( *short pause* )

Here's a towel. It's dry.

JACK

OK.

( *short pause* )

Where's the bulb? It was here a moment ago.

PAULA

Give me your hand.

JACK

Here's my hand. Where's yours?

( *They laugh.* )

JACK

Here it is. I have it.--OK.

( *short pause* )

Hold this.

PAULA

Is it still hot?

JACK

Hold it with the towel..

( *short pause*)

Where's the other bulb. Where did I put the other bulb? Here it is.--OK.

( *Pause. Then the light goes on.*)

PAULA

Thank you.

JACK

You're welcome.

(JACK *appears at the door. He stands for a while. He is downcast.*)

Joey died.

TRESSA HARRIS

...Oh!

(JACK *walks down and sits.*)

JACK

That's why I haven't been around.--I've been a mess. I fell apart. But I wrote this. It's not great but I like it. I like the characters. They are sweet. It kept me from going away.

(PAULA *enters. She stays in the back.*)

JACK

I couldn't stand thinking that he was dead. That I could never see him again. I couldn't sleep. I kept wandering and wandering around the streets...the places we used to go to. But that was too painful, remembering him. Then I went to places I had never been to. But then I got scared because when I had no memories of him I felt desperate. But I couldn't go home because there everything reminded me of him. I saw him sitting on every chair. I saw him in every corner. In the tub, by the sink, on the toilet. On the bed, under the sheets. On top of the covers. I couldn't rest. I couldn't eat. Then I thought I was going to die. Then I wrote this.

( *to Paula*)

You met him... He was my love... He died. He was the sweetest person on earth, That's why I loved him, He was good. Like you. You're good. That's why I love you. You're good.

( *to Tressa*)

I'm not good. I don't know how to be good. I never had that feeling in my heart. Never. I'm just clever, that's all. I laugh at things. I'm not good inside. The most tender I can be is when I'm witty. That's the best I can be. I don't know how to be good. I love goodness, though. I wish I could be good. It's peaceful. Isn't it...being good? When I'm witty I feel close to being good but it's not the same. Joey was good. You could see it in his face, in his body. There was no poison in it. His body was like a baby's. No nerves, No tendons.

( *to PAULA*)

You're good.

( *to both*)

That's why I love you. You and he are the only persons I've loved. And I killed him.

(JACK *is now crying*. TRESSA *goes to him*.)

JACK

( *very intensely*)

It was I who killed him, It was I who killed him. I gave him AIDS. It was I who gave him AIDS. I killed him. I killed him.

TRESSA HARRIS

No Jack. You didn't. You don't have AIDS. You're not contagious. You're not HIV positive. You're negative.

( *He walks left and sits at the table*.)

JACK

His family is being terrible. They didn't want me to see him when he was dying. They didn't want me to go to the funeral. They took all his things. Things I had given him. I didn't want any of it. I just wanted the fur coat that used to be mine and I didn't want any more and I gave it to him because he loved it. That's the only reason I wanted it, because he loved it. He loved to touch it. He loved to lie in bed wearing nothing but the coat. He loved the way it felt on his body. And that's why I wanted it, Because having that coat would make me feel that I still had him. They thought I wanted it because it was valuable, It was an old coat. I wanted to get naked and wear it and feel him.

(JACK *lowers his head slowly*. TRESSA and PAULA *look at him in silence awhile*. PAULA *goes to him*. She *kisses his forehead*.)

PAULA

Remember Shangri-la...? Remember Shangri-la?

(JACK *nods*.)

PAULA

What did the High Lama say to Conway?

JACK

( *Tearful*. He *quotes words from* Lost Horizon.)

"The storm, this storm you talked of..."

PAULA

"I believe you will live through the storm, my child. You will still live through the long age of desolation,

(JACK *joins her*.)

growing older and wiser and more patient.

(TRESSA *joins them*.)

You will preserve the fragrance of our history hidden behind the valley of Shangrila."

( *short pause*)

PAULA

...Let's read your play.

JACK

...Yes.

( *They take the scripts, walk to the upstage area. PAULA and TRESSA sit at each end of the bench. JACK sits on the chair at left. "Banks of the Ohio" from Music of the Ozarks [National Geographic Society] plays.*)

JACK

A one-room cottage on a farm in Vermont. The cottage is impeccably clean. Wilma and Eric sit at the table. Eric wears a suit, Wilma wears a housedress.

ERIC

( *read by one of the women with a heavy German accent*)

This is a very good compote.

WILMA

( *read by the other with a heavy German accent*)

Yah. It is very good compote. And very good bread. I make the bread myself sometimes. This one I didn't make but it is make the same way as the bread I make. And this butter is the best. It couldn't be better because it's make with fresh milk of cows that put out very creamy milk that is tasty because milk can have a bland taste. Here is salt. You can put in salt. Taste it. You look hungry. You want milk. Milk tastes good with bread. It just came out of the cow. It's still warm from the udder.

ERIC

The udder what?

WILMA

The udder from the cow.--Dunk the bread. If you dunk the bread in the milk it gets damp with the milk and it tastes better.

( *They drink.*)

ERIC and WILMA

Ah ha!

WILMA

My hand is damp.

( *She puts her hand on Eric's cheek. Pause.*)

See? I will dry it on my apron because it is damp.

( *She dries her hand and puts it on his cheek again. Pause.*)

See?

( *She takes the hand away.*)

Now it is dry. It is good to keep your hand dry.--Eat, this is the best. Do you know cows better than these ones?

ERIC

I don't know any other cows.

WILMA

I thought you knew other cows.

ERIC

No.

WILMA

It is a pity. Are you not ashamed?

ERIC

I am not ashamed. In the city there are no cows. In the city it is not a pity not to know a cow.

WILMA

Not?

ERIC

No. A cow is large. There is no place to keep a cow in house in the city. And also a lot of people live in apartment. And apartment is smaller than house.

WILMA

Apartment is smaller than house?

ERIC

Of course. People have yard and, also, people have garden. But they don't want cow in garden.

WILMA

Why not?

ERIC

Why not?

WILMA

Yes. Why not?

ERIC

To keep a cow in garden?

WILMA

Why not?

ERIC

Oh.--One, the cow would trample the grass and eat it, Do cows eat flowers?

WILMA

Of course cows eat flowers.



ERIC

Two.--The cow would eat the flowers. Do cows moo?

(WILMA *looks at Eric.*)

WILMA

( *indignant and condescending*)

Do cows moo? Of course cows moo.

ERIC

Well, the cow will moo, then.

WILMA

Cows have to moo. Do you want a cow not to moo? Do you want a cow to say, "I would like to be milked now, so please milk me now."--Is that what you want a cow to do?

ERIC

Do cows moo at night?

WILMA

No cows moo at night.

ERIC

At what time do they moo?

WILMA

When did the cow go to sleep?

ERIC

I don't know when the cow went to sleep.

WILMA

She moos because she wants milking.

ERIC

She needs milking?

WILMA

Of course.

ERIC

Why?

WILMA

Because the milk fills the udders and the milk hurts the udders.

ERIC

What udder?

WILMA

The udder of the cow. If they are milked at six they will moo at six.

ERIC

Like nurses.

WILMA

What?

ERIC

Yah. Six would be too early. A cow mooing at six would wake up everyone.

WILMA

Six is good time to wake up.

ERIC

In the city people get angry if cow make noise at six.

WILMA

I don't see how they could drink fresh milken then.

ERIC

In the city milk is delivered from the country in bottles every day.

WILMA

If it is delivered from the country and the bottles make a tinkle sound it is not fresh, then. It is old milk. It is not like the milk in that glass. Don't drink the milk in the bottle. It is not fresh. Drink this. It is fresh.

( *They drink some milk, lick their lips, smack their lips, and put the glass down.*)

WILMA

Yah!

( *The lights fade to suggest a passage of time. As country music ["Down in the Arkansas," Music of the Ozarks, National Geographic Society] plays, JACK does a cowboy two-step moving to the downstage area.*)

JACK

Act two. A year later. Spring approaches. Wilma wears a housedress. Eric wears a straw hat and a pair of overalls.

(*JACK does a turn doing the two-step and lies down on the downstage bench facing the readers. The music ends.*)

ERIC

I'm going to buy two cows, or one cow and six goats, or ten pigs and some hens. Or not buy cows and build a shed and buy land or put money in the bank.

WILMA

Eric, husband, you work too hard. You want to work all time?--Don't work all time. Put fish in pond and we go fishing on

Sundays.

ERIC

Good Wilma. I am so glad I have you for a wife. I am happy because you are my wife, Wilma, my wife.

WILMA

I am so happy, Eric, husband. Put fish in pond and we go fishing on Sundays.

ERIC

Ah yah. I am glad I married you, Wilma. You make life a paradise.

WILMA

Ahh, Eric, my husband. I am glad.

( *They hold hands.* )

WILMA and ERIC

Yaaaaah!

PAULA and TRESSA

( *applauding* )

Very good Jack! Very good Jack!

( "*Angel Band*" from *Music of the Ozarks* [National Geographic Society] starts playing softly. PAULA and TRESSA go to each side of JACK. He goes toward the plank, faces them, and bows. )

PAULA

That is so beautiful, Jack.

JACK

I thank you.

TRESSA HARRIS

It is so dear.

JACK

( *starting to walk backwards down the plank* )

Thank you.

TRESSA HARRIS

Oh, Jack, I want to cry.

JACK

Cry?

PAULA

I cried, Jack.

(JACK walks toward center as TRESSA and PAULA walk down the plank.)

TRESSA HARRIS

It is so sweet.

(JACK is shyly thrilled and excited. He drops to the floor. They run to him and drop on each side of him and hug him.)

JACK

( opening his arms and speaking religiously)

To Joey!

TRESSA and PAULA

To Joey!

PAULA

May your heart live!

JACK

May your heart live!

TRESSA HARRIS

...May your heart live...

(" Iey Blue Heart by John Hiatt plays. JACK's hands go up in the air, then to his mouth. He blows a kiss as he throws his hands up.)

JACK

Now we celebrate.

TRESSA and PAULA

We celebrate.

( The volume of the music goes up. They dance through the following. JACK goes to the stairs and goes down a few steps. He throws a tablecloth and napkins over the railing. TRESSA catches the tablecloth and lays it on the table. PAULA catches the napkins. TRESSA goes to the kitchen and gets glasses, a bowl of fruit, a paring knife, and a bell. JACK comes up with a paper bag, a bakery box, and a bottle of wine. They set the table. He opens the bottle. PAULA opens the box and takes out croissants, then takes out cheese from the paper bag. They sit around the table, raise their napkins, shake them, and place them on their laps in unison with the music.)

JACK

( raising his glass)

Breakfast!

(TRESSA sounds the bell. TRESSA and PAULA raise their glasses and toast with JACK.)

TRESSA, PAULA, and JACK

Breakfast!

( They drink and eat.)

TRESSA HARRIS

( *toasting* )

May Art live!

ALL

( *toasting* )

May Art live!

( *They drink and eat. The music begins to fade.* )

PAULA

( *toasting* )

May Theater live!

ALL

( *toasting* )

May Theater live!

( *They drink and eat.* )

JACK

( *toasting* )

May Poetry live!

ALL

( *toasting* )

May Poetry live!

(PAULA *walks around the table.* )

PAULA

What would you give to be the greatest artist in the world? Would you give up your youth?... Tressa?

TRESSA HARRIS

I would. How much would I have to give up?

PAULA

Seven years.

(TRESSA *thinks.* )

TRESSA HARRIS

...Seven years...

PAULA

See? We're not interested in art. We're only interested in seduction.

( *continues walking around the table* )

When we're young we pretend we want to be artists. But all we're interested in is seduction. We want the world to have a crush on us. We want to be irresistible.

(JACK and TRESSA *at the same time mumble the following*)

JACK

Not me. I never felt that.

TRESSA HARRIS

That's not so. Art comes first.

PAULA

Would you give up your youthful good looks to be the greatest artists in the world?

JACK and TRESSA

Yeah... Yeah...

PAULA

Look like Quasimodo?

(JACK and TRESSA *applaud*. PAULA *leans on JACK with her arms around him*.)

JACK

Well no. Not that. You're right. I wouldn't.

TRESSA HARRIS

No, not like Quasimodo. That's true. I wouldn't.

TRESSA HARRIS

Yet it doesn't matter. If you're a good artist you will be loved no matter what.

JACK

I wouldn't say no matter what.

TRESSA HARRIS

Ugly artists get loved more than other ugly people.

JACK

Ugly rich people get loved more than ugly artists.

TRESSA HARRIS

True, but next to ugly rich people I think it's ugly artists.

JACK

Yeap.

PAULA

Yeah.

TRESSA HARRIS

To ugly artists.

PAULA and JACK

To ugly artists.

TRESSA HARRIS

*(peeling an apple)*

My mother loved people for their beauty and yet she loved my father because he was an artist. He wasn't good looking. And yet she loved him.--Why? Because he was an artist.--Even if she only loved people for their beauty, she fell in love with him because he was an artist. He didn't look like Quasimodo, but he wasn't the prettiest thing on the earth. Yet she loved him.- Sheonce loved a girl because she was beautiful. She told me she wanted the girl to love her, but she didn't. My father loved my mother because she was beautiful. He too loved people for their beauty. He loved my brother because he was beautiful and he liked to paint him. He didn't like me because I wasn't beautiful.

JACK

You weren't beautiful?

PAULA

What do you mean you're not beautiful?

TRESSA HARRIS

*( ignoring their objections)*

He painted my brother all the time and not me. My mother wanted me to like a girl who lived nearby just because she was beautiful. I didn't like that girl and I told her I didn't love people just because they were beautiful and I didn't like her. But she said, "You should still like her. Because she's beautiful." I didn't like her and that was that.

*( going to the kitchen. To JACK.)*

She didn't like you because you weren't beautiful.

JACK

I wasn't beautiful?

*(PAULA goes to the bench and sits as TRESSA enters.)*

TRESSA HARRIS

She said you weren't. My brother said that you were cute because you looked like me. And she said you didn't.

JACK

I look like you?

TRESSA HARRIS

Yes. That's the reason why I like you. I didn't like girls except for you.

JACK

Me?

(laughs)

TRESSA HARRIS

( *reaching toward* PAULA)

Since then I never liked a girl except for Paula, who is my love. Whom I have loved for years and who won't have me. Because she loves Jack. And won't have me. Because she only has eyes for Jack.

JACK

( *sitting to the left of* PAULA *and hugging her*)

Me too. My eyes are for Paula, my Paula. I only have eyes for you. You should love me and not mean Huang.

PAULA

Huang?

JACK

Yes, that person there is Huang.

PAULA

Paula loves you. She loves you and she always will. Even after death she will love you.

JACK

Paula will not die. She will live forever to love Jack.

TRESSA HARRIS

( *standing*)

...Paula's not well, Jack.

( *pause*)

PAULA

I'm fine.

( *she flexes her muscles*)

I'm fine. I had heart palpitations like fibrillations.

( *pinching* JACK's *cheek*)

My heart beat so fast I thought it would burst. Peter prepared an injection that makes the heart relax and I was OK. Had this continued for one more minute I would have died. But I didn't.

JACK

So many people are ill...so many people...everyone is ill. One day every single person will be ill...old illnesses...new illnesses...old symptoms...new symptoms...old treatments...new treatments...

( *Starting to clear the table. In the course of the speech, JACK takes everything on the table to the kitchen.*)

Everything in our minds will be illness, the ill, the dying. All art will be about illness. All plays will be about illness. And



the ill. The characters will be defined by their illness. It is the characters' illness that will determine the plot. Instead of the ingenue, the romantic lead, the friend, the villain, the characters will be defined by their illness: the cancer victim, the AIDS victim, the tubercular, the diabetic. The person poisoned by industrial chemicals, in the air, in food. The central issue of the plots will be the development of the illness: the first notice of the symptoms, the first visit to the doctor, the relationship with the doctors, with other patients, with family, with one's own body, with side effects, how one copes. Treatment will be an integral part of the plot.--The plots will be whether to save one patient or the other: possibility of blackmail, bribes in exchange for special treatment, relationships with the attending doctor: attachment, hatred, jealousy toward other patients. Or bank robberies to pay for medical care. The murder mysteries will be: patients of a renowned doctor are murdered. The doctor is suspected but the murderer is a patient who is waiting his turn for an operation and he may die before the doctor can get to him, so he kills all patients who are scheduled before him. The serial murders will be: the patient kills everyone who has the same disease as him so he can have his choice of physician. After a while plays will be more subtle. Each character will suffer a different illness. The illness won't be mentioned, but the audience will be able to identify it by the way the characters walk, the way they stand, the way they breathe. Does his hand go up to a certain part of the body? His side, his neck? Does he need to catch his breath: The best actors will be the ones who can reproduce the particular breathing for each illness. We'll notice the way the character enters, the way she sits, the way they kiss. We'll notice the way they avoid contact with each other. The audience will also be able to identify the illness by the little pills the characters bring to their mouths. Is it the one with the yellow stripe or the royal blue stripe? The bottle with the blue label? What is the gravity of the illness? Is the character taking one, two, or more pills at a time? How frequently? The leading characters will have the illness most common among theatergoers. Since theatergoers prefer to have plays written about them. Plays will be funded by pharmaceutical laboratories.

( *There is a pause.*)

PAULA

( *standing*)

Well...It's time for me to go.

JACK

( *distressed*)

Are you going to the doctor now?

PAULA

Don't worry. We're all a part of it...Not one of us is invulnerable to it.

( *pause*)

Where is my briefcase?

( *She looks for it and exits left. She reenters with the briefcase.*)

Here it is. OK, I'll be back.

( *She goes to the landing and starts down.*)

JACK

( *starting to go down*)

I'll walk you down.

PAULA

Heavens, I'm not an invalid.

JACK

( *stopping* )

Of course.

TRESSA HARRIS

You don't want me to drive you.

PAULA

Heavens no. I have my car.

( *She starts down the steps. JACK leans over the railing* )

JACK

Give me a kiss.

(PAULA *gives him a kiss. She continues down.*)

JACK

Tell them what I think of you.

TRESSA HARRIS

Tell them to give you all their money.

PAULA

I will.

JACK

You just tell them that. And tell them to give you that job.

PAULA

OK.

TRESSA HARRIS

And tell the doctor there's nothing wrong with you.

PAULA

I will.--Thanks, you-all. See you later.

TRESSA HARRIS

Good luck.

PAULA

Thank you.

JACK

Don't take any wooden nickels.

(PAULA *laughs.*)

PAULA

I won't.

TRESSA HARRIS

Are you going to be back for dinner?

PAULA

I think so.

JACK

I'm bringing Chinese.

( *The lights begin to fade.* )

PAULA

Good. I'll be here, then.

TRESSA HARRIS

We're eating early. I have to be at work at six.

PAULA

At what time should I be back?

TRESSA HARRIS

Four thirty will be good.

PAULA

OK.

JACK

...Good-bye...

PAULA

Good-bye.

( *A moment passes.* )

JACK

...Good-bye...

( *A moment passes.* )

JACK

...Good-bye...

( *There is the sound of the door closing. JACK turns to face front. He looks gloomy. There is a pause.* )

Three years since I last saw her...

( *The lights fade to black.*)

## Act 2

### ACT II

(JACK and TRESSA perform scenes from D` W` Griffith's Broken Blossoms while silent-movie organ music plays. JACK performs Lillian Gish's part, *The Girl*, and wears the loose frock of a waif. TRESSA performs Richard Barthelmess's part, *Huang*, and wears a Chinese box jacket and pants. They first walk in opposite directions around the stage, reenacting the scene where the Girl has been beaten by her father and wanders around in the streets to finally faint on the floor of Huang's shop (upstage). Huang takes her up to his room (downstage) and dresses her in an embroidered silk gown, lowers her to his bed, puts makeup on her face, and puts a decorative crown of flowers on her head. She falls asleep as he exits. A moment later turbulent music is heard. An invisible Father has entered. The Girl is terrified. The Father shakes her and throws her on the floor, grabs her by the arm and takes her home. There he beats her unconscious and leaves. Huang enters to find a dying Girl. He holds her in his arms as she dies. They stay motionless for a while. PAULA comes up the stairs and watches the last minutes of their act. PAULA walks to them. She looks at them and touches JACK's face and the ornaments on his face. She touches TRESSA's face. She walks around the front, goes to the kitchen, and reenters with a flan mold on a plate and a spoon. She eats a few mouthfuls of the flan. JACK and TRESSA start to come out of their stillness and walk slowly downstage to Paula.

PAULA

When I was little I had a cousin who was my age. I loved him very much. He was my first lover. We did everything. He put his pipi inside me and I enjoyed it very much. The first time he tried he wasn't able to put it in very far. But each time after he put it in a little further until he came in all the way, which wasn't very far because we were very little. Each time we enjoyed it more. I learned to come with him. But I didn't come each time. And I got very upset when I didn't. He said he didn't mind. He said he liked it when I came and he liked it when I didn't. I said, "Well, I don't," and he said that he liked to see me desperate and frustrated. And I said, "Why?" And he said, "Because then I know you want something from me." He saw my frustration as desire. Which it was. He was a sweet darling and...And I forgave him. He was eight and so was I.

( *pause*)

I saw the doctor.--He says it's kind of bad.--He said that if the fibrillations had lasted any longer I could have died. I asked him and that's what he said--that it was true. He said that Peter should teach the kids to do an intravenous injection in case it happens when he is not home.--but I don't have too much hope for that. It's difficult to do. So I suppose I would have to do it myself. But how could I give myself an intravenous injection in that state with that horrible feeling that your heart is coming out of your mouth? I don't know if I could do it. So I suppose I will have to die.

( *She puts her head on JACK' s head, walks around the bench and faces them.*)

You look beautiful together...I never imagined...

( *short pause*)

Do you mind that I saw you.

(TRESSA and JACK shake their heads.)

PAULA

It's "Broken Blossoms," isn't it?

JACK

( *almost in a whisper*)

...Yes.

( *pause*)

PAULA

...Do you mind my asking?

TRESSA HARRIS

...No.

PAULA

...Is this something you do?

JACK

...Yes.

( *pause* )

PAULA

...Are you lovers?

JACK

...We love each other...

( *touching their clothes* )

...And we love this...It is very satisfying.

PAULA

... *Broken Blossoms*?

TRESSA HARRIS

...Oh yes...

PAULA

...Does it satisfy you...? I mean...do you?

TRESSA HARRIS

...Oh yes...

PAULA

Huang...? Do you always wear...? I mean...is this a man's outfit?

TRESSA HARRIS

...Yes.

PAULA

...Do you ever wear women's clothes...when you are with him?

( *JACK walks slowly to the upper bench and sits peacefully.* )

TRESSA HARRIS

...No.

PAULA

...Why not?

TRESSA HARRIS

( *short pause* )

Once I knew why.

( *short pause* )

It makes him nervous.

PAULA

What does?

TRESSA HARRIS

I think it does.

( *to JACK* )

Does it make you nervous?

( *She looks at him* )

Yes, it makes him nervous.

PAULA

What does?

TRESSA HARRIS

The woman.

PAULA

You're a lovely woman.

JACK

...She's a lovely man.

TRESSA HARRIS

I like to wear this...

( *walking around the left of the bench and turning to them* )

It soothes me. I wear this when he comes.

PAULA

Why is that?

TRESSA HARRIS

He's calm. I like him when he's calm.

PAULA

Do you think he will fall in love with you if you dress like a man?

TRESSA HARRIS

Yes. He did once...

PAULA

He did?

TRESSA HARRIS

Yes.

PAULA

Fell in love with you?

TRESSA HARRIS

Yes.

PAULA

Did you fall in love with him?

TRESSA HARRIS

( *sitting by the foot of the bench* )

Yes.

PAULA

Are you still in love with him.

TRESSA HARRIS

In love with him...

( *sitting* )

I am in love with him. Of course I am. I'll always be...Always but not the same way...

PAULA

I'm glad you're clear about that.

TRESSA HARRIS

It's very clear.

PAULA

( *going to her, and kissing her on the forehead* )

I love you, Huang.

TRESSA HARRIS

He did love me--one night.

PAULA

Oh?

TRESSA HARRIS

We dressed up for a costume party. I wore a tuxedo, he was wearing a gown, his arms were bare. We left here arm in arm.

*(JACK stands, walks slowly to the upper bench, sits, and listens peacefully.)*

TRESSA HARRIS

At the party, he looked at me lovingly. We moved toward each other. I held him in my arms, his head leaned on my shoulder, my arm pressed around his delicate waist. We danced...and we danced. His hands were trembling. We danced very close, his heart was pounding in his chest. It went boom boom Boom boom. Boom boom. He was sweating and he looked frightened. His eyes turned away from me as he held me closer and closer. He smiled nervously and he said, "let's go home." He took me home and we made love.

PAULA

Jack...?

TRESSA HARRIS

Jack.

JACK

Yes we did.

PAULA

When was that?

TRESSA HARRIS

A long time ago. After that night, I didn't see him for a long time.

PAULA

Coward.

TRESSA HARRIS

Not I.

*( pause)*

He went away. And didn't come back for a long time. Then one day he came. He was quiet, nervous, scared that something would happen. Scared that I would want something to happen. I didn't show my feelings.-Things went back to normal. He started coming to see me again. I noticed that if I wore a dress he'd be nervous. If I wore pants he was relaxed. One day I dressed like this. And I felt very calm and he was very calm. And he came close to me and he said "Wang." And I said "Yes." And he held me close and he whispered..."Broken Blossoms?"...And I said, "Yes." He was beautiful and I felt beautiful and it was beautiful just the way we were with each other, at peace with each other.

PAULA

Do you still want him?

TRESSA HARRIS



Once in love always in love. We're friends, I love him, and he loves me. Like friends. That's the way love is.

(PAULA *goes to the table and sits right*)

PAULA

( *to* TRESSA)

Do you want to buy my house? They're going to sell it. Maybe in the future you can ask me to visit.--and maybe I wouldn't be able to visit. I couldn't stand going there and thinking it belongs to anyone else. Even you. Why are they willing to sell it for nothing to anyone but me? Why can't I buy it for nothing the way anyone else can?

( *short pause*)

Are we going to cook or go out?

TRESSA HARRIS

Let's get Chinese. Jack, you want to go get some food?

(PAULA *starts walking around* TRESSA *slowly. She is observing her. Looking at her under a different light.*)

JACK

...Sure...

( *going behind the screen*)

What do you want?

TRESSA HARRIS

Mushu pork.

JACK

And you, Paula?

PAULA

Chicken with mushrooms.

JACK

( *to himself, from behind the screen*)

Moo goo gai pan.

PAULA

( *to* TRESSA)

Are you coming to the party?

TRESSA HARRIS

Tonight?

PAULA

Yes.

TRESSA HARRIS

I have to work.

PAULA

After work.

TRESSA HARRIS

No...I'll be tired then.

*(JACK comes out from behind the screen. He is wearing jeans and a leather jacket.)*

JACK

You want rice?

PAULA

Fried rice.

TRESSA HARRIS

Steamed rice.

JACK

*(pointing to each as he repeats their choices)*

Mushu pork. Chicken and mushrooms. Moo goo gai pan. Fried rice. Steamed rice. Steamed rice.

*(He starts exiting.)*

You want fortune cookies?

TRESSA HARRIS

Yeah.

PAULA

Sure.

JACK

Yeah.

*(JACK exits whistling as the lights fade.)*

*(It is 2:00 a.m. The lights are dim. JACK's leather jacket is on the back of a chair. There is a light downstairs. JACK's voice is heard from below. He memorizes the backstage work from Everett Quinton's Tale of Two Cities at the Ridiculous Theatrical Company.)*

JACK

Preshow. Open dressing room. Turn on hot water to sink and shower. Set clothes up in dressing room. Check water, cups, kleenex. Costumes checked

*(Checklist).*

Turn on water to bathtub. Turn on work and running lights. Drain water barrel. Open prop cabinet. Set up all props. Check

winch and track. Check main drape and wigpipe. Patch hole. Set up costumes from closet. Check preset. Set up closet and curtain.

( *A light is turned on in the bedroom.* )

Give deck ready to stage manager. Fix food,--Act one. Open main curtain. Show starts--strike window light. Closet opens--knock over closet pile. Door closes--move basket to doorway. Everett sits after phone--ring doorbell. Ding dong, Cue: "Goddamn it."

(TRESSA *enters from the bedroom. She watches* JACK.)

JACK

Knock on door. Door starts to open--run behind set. Basket on dresser--open trap door. Donut handed to baby--toss downstage right. After donut toss--reset closet stuff and Manette stuff.

TRESSA HARRIS

Jack.

JACK

Hi.

TRESSA HARRIS

What are you doing?

JACK

I'm going over my backstage running list.

TRESSA HARRIS

What running list?

JACK

The show I'm stage managing. It's a tough show to run. Ridiculous theater. Things move to fast. I have to memorize it. Otherwise I won't be able to keep up. Things happen just like this

( *snapping his fingers rapidly* ).

One after the other. Would you check me on this?

TRESSA HARRIS

OK.

JACK

After donut toss--open trap door. You see where that is?

TRESSA HARRIS

OK. Yeah. Go ahead.

JACK

After donut toss--reset closet stuff and set Manette stuff. Pross entrance--open trap door. Fork into basket--grab fork and hand off broken fork. After fork taken--close trap door. Cue: "Anything but black bread and death"--ring doorbell. Hand off from Everett--receive wig head from Everett. Door closed--take wig head to closet. Everett into closet--hand white wig to

Everett, label up. Everett into closet--tap on closet wall. Everett out of closet--stop tapping. After Manette scene open trap door. Cue: "Crush him under the wheels"--receive frame and box. Closet opens, Everett into closet--help Everett into coat and swagger stick. Cue: "Feed you with a slingshot"--squirt Everett with water bottle. After squirt--close trap door. During broadcast--receive clothes. TV report--receive TV. Alarm

( *makes alarm sound*)

--set pannier. Cue: "Very good understanding, Mr` Darnay."

TRESSA HARRIS

"A health, a toast."

JACK

Right! "A health, a toast"--open trap door. Then "Very good understanding, Mr. Darnay"--raise baby in basket. Cue: "Evremonde!!!!"--Raise baby knife, hold three beats and lower. After knife--close trap door. Cue: "She must not find us together"--help Everett with pannier, basket, and Christmas garland and start

( *singing*)

"O come all Ye Faithful." Cue: "God bless you, Sidney"--receive pannier, etc` Cue: "Work comrades all"--hand out red sheet.

( *He comes upstairs carrying two blankets, a pillow, the script, and a flashlight and starts making his bed on the downstage bench. He is wearing jeans and a T shirt.*)

Now I have to memorize the second act.

TRESSA HARRIS

You need some rest.

JACK

( *lies down and covers himself with the blanket*)

I'll do it tomorrow.

(TRESSA *kisses him on the cheek, and starts left.*)

TRESSA HARRIS

Try to get some sleep.

JACK

I will.

TRESSA HARRIS

Goodnight.

JACK

Goodnight.

(TRESSA *exits. JACK turns on the flashlight and very quietly memorizes the following.*)

JACK

Raise baby knife, hold three beats, and lower. After knife--close trap door. Raise baby knife, hold three beats, and lower.

After knife--close trap door. Cue: "She must not find us together"--

( *The lights being to fade as he starts to doze off and his voice becomes softer.*)

Help Everett with the pannier, basket, and Christmas garland and start...O come all ye faithful...

( *The lights fade to a very dim level. A few seconds pass.*)

( *It is 4:00 a`m` The lights remain the same. JACK is still asleep. The upstage door opens, then closes. PAULA' s footsteps are heard below. Something is knocked down.*)

PAULA

What was that?

( *pause*)

Jack?

( *pause*)

Are you there?

( *Cans drop and roll downstairs. JACK begins to stir.*)

PAULA

God!

( *pause*)

What's the matter with this light?

( *pause*)

Jack.

( *Something falls downstairs.*)

Damn it!

( *pause*)

It's dark here.

( *Something falls downstairs.*)

What's this?

( *The sound of something being thrown. She starts up the stairs.*)

Jack.

JACK

...What...?

PAULA

I hit your car and I don't know if I damaged it.--I think I did. But it wasn't my fault and I'm not paying you for it.--You were parked in the wrong direction and that's illegal. If you take me to court you won't collect because it's illegal to park in the wrong direction. The front of the car doesn't reflect and oncoming car so if you're coming into it you can't see it. It was dark

and I didn't see it.--I didn't even see the road. I was drunk and I couldn't see a thing. Didn't even know I was driving on the sidewalk. It doesn't matter whether I was driving on the sidewalk or not. And it doesn't matter whether I was drunk or not drunk. I am not drunk. I only had a couple of drinks.

( *sits* )

In a court of law if you're parked on the wrong direction you don't have a leg to stand on. I don't know how much damage I did to your car but I'm not paying for it. In fact I think my car is embedded into yours. I may have totaled my car and yours too. What time is it?

(*JACK is dumbfounded. PAULA continues talking as she goes downstairs.*)

PAULA

I'm going down to see what the damage is but I'm not paying for it because you were parked in the wrong direction and that's illegal.

JACK

What did you say?

PAULA

I said you were parked in the wrong direction and that that's illegal. That the front of the car doesn't reflect and oncoming car so if you're coming into it you can't see it. That it was too dark and I didn't see it. That I couldn't even see the road. That my car is embedded in yours.

(*PAULA goes downstairs. JACK drops to the floor. PAULA's footsteps are heard. The upstage door opens. The lights of dawn are seen outside. JACK stands. He goes to the kitchen, reenters, looks around. He is dumbfounded.*)

JACK

( *almost speechless* )

...Tressa...

TRESSA HARRIS

( *somnolent* )

...Yes...?

JACK

Did you hear that?

TRESSA HARRIS

...What...?

JACK

Paula wrecked my car.

( *There is a silence. SHE snores.* )

JACK

( *to himself* )

...My car...

( *He prepares himself a cup of tea and walks up the ramp. He drinks. PAULA' s footsteps are heard. She comes up the steps and sees him.*)

PAULA

It's OK. I think I dozed off for a moment there when I parked. I guess I must've dreamt I crashed.

( *She goes to the landing, looks at Jack and laughs.*)

You look kind of scared.

( *She goes to the table and sits.*)

Is that tea you're drinking?

(JACK *looks at the cup, then looks at PAULA and speaks in a high-pitched voice.*)

JACK

Yes.

PAULA

May I have some?

JACK

Yes.

PAULA

( *ingratiatingly*)

I'm glad I didn't wreck your car.

( *pause*)

JACK

( *in a high squeaky voice*)

Oh...

PAULA

Relieved?

JACK

Oh...

PAULA

Oh what?

(JACK *exits dumbfounded. TRESSA appears left She is putting on a housecoat.*)

TRESSA HARRIS

Hi.

PAULA

Hi.

TRESSA HARRIS

What happened?

PAULA

Nothing.

TRESSA HARRIS

You just got in?

PAULA

Just now.

TRESSA HARRIS

How was the party?

PAULA

You're lucky you didn't come.

TRESSA HARRIS

What?--Was it boring?

PAULA

Yes. It was depressing.

TRESSA HARRIS

What happened?

PAULA

Nothing happened.--Dan and Flo were there.

TRESSA and JACK

Oh.

(TRESSA *stretches her neck.*)

PAULA

You're tired.

TRESSA HARRIS

I'm going to bed.

( *starts to exit left*)

PAULA

Yes, it's late.



TRESSA HARRIS

Good night.

PAULA

Good night.

JACK

Good night.

*( reaches for his jacket and puts it on)*

PAULA

Where are you going?

JACK

Going for a walk.

PAULA

Now?!

JACK

Yeah, I feel restless.

PAULA

Where're you going?

JACK

Out.

*( He kisses PAULA and starts to exit. PAULA is anxious.)*

PAULA

Be careful.

JACK

I will.

PAULA

*( Her anxiety builds.)*

I'll go with you.

JACK

No Paula.

PAULA

Please.

JACK

I want to be alone.

PAULA

( *going on her knees by the railing* )

Where are you going?

( *She waits a moment* )

Why Jack? I'm worried! Let me go with you!

JACK

I'll be all right.

PAULA

Please! Jack!

( *silence* )

Jaaack!! Where are you going!!! Where are you going!!!

(TRESSA *enters form the kitchen. She and PAULA look at each other. PAULA stands.*)

PAULA

He went...

( *They embrace.* )

PAULA

Into the night.

( *sobs* )

Into the night... Into the night...

( *The lights fade.* )

( *It's 5:00 a`m` JACK is standing on the railing. His hands are tied behind him to the post He is bare-chested. There is blood smeared on his chest. TRESSA stands left, PAULA right. The both face him.* )

JACK

They wanted to fuck me and they did. They fucked me till I was blue in the face. One first and then another and another. And they couldn't get enough. And I wanted all they had. They didn't use condoms. Nothing.

On the raw. I told them I was HIV positive. They didn't care.

I did, and I handed them condoms.

And they didn't take them. They said they had more pleasure without them. I was bleeding like a faucet and they fucked me and fucked me and it hurt like the devil and I screamed and screamed till I couldn't scream any more. And they kept fucking me, one after the other, and I never had so much pleasure in my life.

TRESSA HARRIS

Didn't they?

You're not!

Why did you say that?

Why did you say that?

Did they know what a condom is?

Did you think you were giving them AIDS?

PAULA

Didn't they, Jack?

Why do you think you are? Why Jack?

Oh, Jack!

Oh, Jack!

JACK

I handed them condoms and they didn't care. I've never been so happy in my life. One big cock after another. I screamed like a goat in the slaughterhouse. I don't know. I don't know. Did I think? Did I think? I didn't think. I didn't think when I got it. I just got it. It's a virus. It happened when I got fucked by someone. When you get a cold, do you wonder who gave it to you? No one gave it to me. I got it. Maybe I got it when I got the best fuck of my life. And then maybe I got it into me when I got a lousy fuck...so what.

( *He puts his head down and sobs.*)

Don't touch me.

Don't touch me.

I'm contagious.

I don't want to give you AIDS.

( *sobs*)

I have AIDS.

I'm contagious.

I have AIDS. I have AIDS. I have AIDS.

TRESSA HARRIS

Oh...

Oh...

You don't have AIDS.

Jack, you don't have AIDS.

You don't have AIDS. And if you did, you would never do what you say you did. Jack, you would never do that. Jack, you

have to protect yourself. You don't

PAULA

Why does he say he has AIDS?

Why does he say that? Stop it, Jack! Stop it.

JACK

Yes. I am!

What should I remember?

TRESSA HARRIS

have AIDS. You're not HIV positive. You have to be careful. No. Remember.

TRESSA HARRIS

That you don't have AIDS. That you have been tested. Why do you think you have AIDS?

( *He is near fainting.* )

TRESSA HARRIS

You don't have AIDS. You don't. You don't. I have seen your tests. You're not. You're not.

(*SHE reaches to him as he descends. She holds him up as they walk back to the banch.*)

JACK

Because...Because...Because...

( *She sits holding him on her lap in a Pieta position. She slides her hand on his chest.* )

TRESSA HARRIS

All my life I've had a passion in me and it is for you. All my life it was there, has been there, reserved for you. I never felt it. I never knew that passion was in me.--It was there, but only for you. I say "you" because I don't know what else to call you. I could call you Key, or Burst, or Debris, or Flood. You touched it and it rose and burst out like a dike that opens to the force of the waters inside and everything comes out, water, stones, boulders, tress. Like prisoners in a jail who think of nothing but escape day and night, year after year and then the riot breaks and the doors crack and burst open because of the force of the explosion as if it were of dynamite, or like the eruption of a volcano underneath the floors when the force of the prisoners' desire for freedom erupts and the walls burst and the stones and the water rush through the opening ferociously, wildly, and fearlessly. It is like that. It feels like that. You touched it and it rose and burst out; water, hard stones, branches, gravel, mud, foam...out of my chest...for you...burst. Let me call you Burst.

(*PAULA kneels next to them. Her head is on JACK' s knees. A blazing fire is projected on them. A gust of wind blows on them while JACK starts lifting his head slowly. TRESSA and PAULA start looking up. The voice of the High Lama and the music of the film are heard as they speak. Stormy Wagnerian music joins in.*)

THE HIGH LAMA'S VOICE

"I have waited for you, my son, for a long time. You will live through the storm. You will preserve the fragrance of our history and add to it a tuch of your own mind. Beyond that, my vision weakens, but I see, at a great distance, a new world stirring in the ruins. Stirring clumsily but in hopefulness, seeking it's lost and legendary treasures. And they will all be here my son, hidden behind the mountains,..."

( *The volume of the music increases as the lights fade to black.* )

"...in the valley of Shangri-La, preserved as by a miracle."

( *It is 8:00 am. TRESSA sits by the bench. PAULA stands. She is finishing putting her clothes in a suitcase on the table.*)

(PAULA *puts the last garments in the suitcase.*)

TRESSA HARRIS

He's still asleep. Should I wake him?

PAULA

Let him sleep.

PAULA

I'll wait a while. I want to see him before I go. He's going through the worse time. I'd like to ask him to come up and spend a few days with us.

TRESSA HARRIS

That would be good for him. That would be good. To spend a few days in the country

PAULA

Yes it would...to spend a few days in the open. He likes it there. Maybe when the play closes... a week or two.

TRESSA HARRIS

Yes. That would be good for him. He's going through a very hard time...

PAULA

Yes... You go to sleep, Tressa. You must be tired. I'll wait for him.

TRESSA HARRIS

... Yes, Paula...I'm tired.

(JACK *enters from the bedroom. He is wrapped in a blanket*)

JACK

...I'm tired

( *HE walks slowly to the desk and sits.*)

...I can't go back to sleep..

( *The lights fade slowly as JACK lets out a soft cry. The lights go to black.*)